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SPRING 2016

**It's warming up —
let's take Nest to
the garden!**

This issue of Seven Days quarterly supplement about home design and real estate explores a rebuilt, midcentury home and a medieval inspired castle. We consider rental properties and happily dream about flowers at a local nursery. What will you plant in your backyard?

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Chicken - Photo courtesy of Julie Rubaud



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Starting Over

Post-fire, a Colchester house stands better than ever

BY AMY LILLY • PHOTOS BY MATTHEW THORSEN

On the night of January 24, 2014, Rich Cook, his wife, Danielle, and their children returned from a dinner out to find their Colchester house on fire. The 1970 ranch-style structure had a midcentury aesthetic and was filled with period furniture that Cook had spent 20 years acquiring, along with a sizable collection of art. That night, while awaiting the volunteer firefighters' arrival, he stood outside in 6 degrees Fahrenheit and watched it all go up in flames.

None of the structure held, including the bones of the house's main room — a funky hexagonal living/dining/kitchen space with a brick chimney in the center. Cook credits this to the previous owners' decision to raise the room's roof to a height of 17 feet by attaching a second, higher round of drywall to the existing layer.

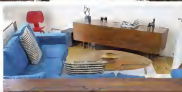
While the fire destroyed the kitchen where it had started — go figure on the spring break wiring: the exact source was never determined — the double drywall helped much of the remaining room survive. Its contents, meanwhile, were reduced to rubble.

Cook's house is now rebuilt. Unusually for homeowners in his position, he chose not to raise and build new but to retain as much of the original plan as possible. Long

a midcentury-design aficionado, Cook saw the value of preserving a living space that was both unique and comfortable. (His brother, who is in film and vintage pieces on Lettids.com, has made a career out of midcentury design.)

Builder Doug Ellwood, vice president of GW Savage Corp., which rebuilt the house, agrees the place was special. "Everything has gone cookie-cutter. No one's building one-sided rooms like this days," he says with a shrug.

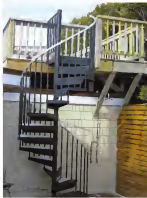
On a recent weekday, Cook and Ellwood greeted this reporter in the house's trapezoidal entry space, which borders the hexagonal room. Tall and slim, Cook is a father of three and recently found himself,





This page: clockface from top left
A modern mid-century modern
A view in the modern kitchen
Open view to the modern kitchen
Clockface from top left

Opposite page: top to bottom
Exterior view in modern kitchen
View of the modern kitchen





Starting Over

he says) divorced. He works from home and also travels around the country as the deputy development director for a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

Recalling the night of the fire, Cook says, "It was something else, standing on the corner watching your house burn down." His tone shifts at last to betray residual shock. Over the next year, Cook carried on negotiations with his insurance company while living with his family in hotel rooms and a rented house and continuing to work full time. He also immersed himself fully in the rebuilding phase.

Today, apart from some oddly shaped trees out back whose burned parts were pruned, there is no trace of the fire. The house is now better insulated and more structurally sound. The Savage crew rebuilt the hexagonal room's joists to bear the weight of its height, which had caused the walls to bow outward. Windows that once lined the back of the hexagon have been replaced by sliding glass doors, which open onto a patio, an outdoor shower and a spiral staircase. The stairs lead

to a rebuilt roof deck that has a view of nearby Lake Champlain.

Two wings radiate off the hexagonal center: a hall flanked by two baths and three bedrooms, and a mezzanine that connects to the garage and a rear office. These have been entirely rebuilt and designed to the smallest detail. As Cook declares, "If your house burns down, there's no better time to do these things."

Brooke Michelson, a friend and interior designer, remodeled the structural interior. In the only departure from the original floor plan, she made the previously narrow kitchen roomier and more functional. Michelson also inserted a pantry into an adjacent space that had been an unconnected third bathroom, and she reconfigured the two bedrooms—joining bedrooms. The master bath includes a stunning sculptural tub.

Michelson brought in cabinetmaker Dan Ober to do the custom plywood and white, French-stained cabinetry, which Cook chose based on one of the Case Study Houses of midcentury architect Richard Neutra.

Michelson did all this for free. "I felt compelled to help them after all that devastation. My father lost his house to a fire when I was 8," she explains.

The Richmond-based designer worked from architectural plans that were drawn up, also free of charge, by Burdette Long, where Michelson's friend, Brian Mac, is an architect.

Throughout, Cook was deeply involved. When he discovered that the deck stair built to code would have taken up much of the back patio, the homeowners scoured the space saving spiral stair sofas. The found opacified bent racks, clear hardware and light sources, and even helped carpenter Seth Allen, of *Sister Builders*, to finish two thick, irregular slabs of wood for the dining table and bathroom counter-top.

Cook's housewarming party occurred the manner with midcentury originals: an Eames lounge chair flanked by a Planer side table, low slung walnut

Knoll credenzas and Eero Saarinen pedestal tables. A tripod floor lamp turned out to be a Gilbert Warrens, the finish from a Museum of Modern Art lighting competition in 1955 and was in production for a single year. A blue couch and red Knoll bench stand out against white walls and wood accents. Cook's daughter's room has an imitation Alexander Calder mobile.

"I have a decent eye," Cook admits. A design enthusiast, he grew up south

of Boston in a home environment that was neither hot to design, he says. But, as a 12-year-old on family trips to major cities, he recalls, "the only thing I wanted to do was go see the museums of modern art."

Artwork by a mix of local and internationally established artists accents the walls: a black-and-white framed photo of a black woman in a white headscarf by the renowned African American photographer Charles Johnson, a double-panel abstract painting in pale blues by former Barbican artist Scott Campbell, a small original work by proto-pop artist Robert Rauschenberg, and a framed work by Seven Days/Week photographer Matthew Thomas. (He described a second one after learning the original had burned.) Cook and his daughter created the large, wall-hung sculpture in the entry, an assemblage of wood pieces that recalls, and perhaps pays homage to, Louise Nevelson.

It's strange to say, but the fire couldn't have happened to a warrier homeowner. Instead of building a right-angled McManis, Cook helped reconstruct a modest but covers modernist structures, one that continues to fit with its neighborhood and revels in that city's resurgence style.

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INFO

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Credenza: Freeland left.

Wall sculpture by Cook and his daughter.

Master bath with white-stained French oak cabinetry and a sculptural tub.

The girls' room with a vintage Eero Saarinen pedestal table.

Wallpaper in the master bedroom.

New vinyl floor in the master bedroom.



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nest

Growing Where You're Planted

How to boost your backyard's flower power

BY MOLLY WALSH

Very soon, that first glorious spring day will arrive and, with it, the urge to create something beautiful and blossomy in the backyard. Whether your goal is to augment an existing garden or start from scratch, now is the time to plan.

We asked Julie Rabaud, owner of Red Wagon Plants in Bloomsburg, for some advice.

On a late February morning, seeds for tomatoes and peppers were germinating in trays near a heater in one of her busy houses. Rabaud searched over fragrant lavender plants that had miraculously survived the winter in the space. Outside, the red berries of an ornamental saucer shrub stood out in the gray winter light.

A new gardener—or a new house owner with a “blank canvas”—needs to begin by doing some homework, Rabaud said. Study the light on your property with an understanding that some flowers love sun and others need shade. Take note of the sunnier spots, where the snow melts soonest in the spring. Which hots the sun and shade change across the yard from morning to afternoon.

Rabaud has been growing things that weave life and nature

dazzled by what the sun can do in a yard. “It’s the slowest-moving performance art,” she said.

It’s important, too, to learn what kind of soil your yard has. (That’s a topic beyond the scope of this article, but plenty of help can be found, then asking sources to your local extension service, to other, more experienced gardeners.) Also observe where your yard is dry, wet or exposed to the wind.

Inside your house, look out a window onto the yard and think about planting where your gaze falls. You might also consider flowers that attract butterflies or feed the bees.

Next, plan your layout. Straight lines and rectangles are orderly, but half moons, circles and curving borders might work well in your yard. Pay attention to flow. Rabaud encourages gardeners to use the paths that people take on a property “almost as a dried line” to guide design. Make note of your own habits, and plant along routes to common destinations such as a shed. “See which way you walk to the mailbox, which way you walk to the car,” she suggested.

The layout works best when the yard “feels like rooms [that have] always been there,” Rabaud said.

Especially with a new flower garden, you should anticipate its maintenance. Generally more color means more weeding. Rabaud noted: Many blooms create a lot of dead-ending—the removal of dying blossoms to invigorate new ones. And while the overwielding English cottage garden looks effortless, that’s deceptive. It tends to be labor-intensive, she cautioned.

An alternative is to buy three flower varieties in abundance and group them together. This creates the “confetti” effect a multitude blooms planted willfully. It also reduces your temptation to buy clashing materials because they’re on sale.

Rabaud likes to line a walkway with curly parsley, sweet alyssum and pansies, then fill in with asters or marigolds when full moons arrive and heat-sensitive pansies die back. She often weaves edibles, such as that parsley, with flowers for aroma and fragrance. Garlic chives, with their



In Your Element

Rich Cook & Family, Colchester, Vermont
Mid-Century Enthusiast, Child Advocate, Father

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white flower heads, and variegated lemon thyme are also good options. Another interesting combination, she suggested, is rainbow chard, nasturtiums (easy to grow from seed) and a trellis holding up scarlet runner beans. Ornamental grasses also add height and contrast.

Edging can be just as beautiful as Mosses. Enjoy shades of green by grouping Solanum's seed, lady's mantle and hosta. Also incorporate different heights, as with the tree nasturtium, jay's blue, dwarf Mangelwurm, and verbena bonariensis — a tall, slender, purple-tipped flower.

Scallop-shaped can help a garden maintain appeal from stick season through mid-season. Eranthis, dogwoods and hydrangeas work well. Rubus also likes variegated yellow and Physocarpus, commonly known as ninesbark.

"You can create a lot of texture and color without flowers," she said.

Red Wagon specializes in herbs and edibles. Some of Rubus's earliest gardening memories are of picking tender butter lettuce and escarole for dinner. "I'm from a French family, so we had really nice kitchen gardens," she recalled.

Rubus was born in Meghan, France, as Alpine ski town. Her family moved to Vermont in 1980, when she was 6. Her father, Gérard Rubus, took a job with French ski instructor Rosignol, which then led to a move to Williams.

He later ran a restaurant in Burlington and then moved on to baking bread. The senior Rubus still bakes crusty country loaves five times a week at his home in Westford, where Julia grew up.

She got her start growing herbs for her father's restaurant in a plot at Burlington's Intervale. Rubus briefly lived in the red-brick farmhouse on the property — it's where her (now college-age) daughter was born. Though edibles are still Rubus's focus, Red Wagon also offers a wide range of annual and perennial flowers. This year the retail side of the business celebrates its 10th anniversary. It opens for the season on April 15.

Over the years, Rubus has learned to accept nature's gifts. At her home in Hinesburg, she said, one of her "happy accidents" was a patch of wildflowers that appeared next to dwarf sunflowers, edibles and ornamental cactus. "It was a lovely reminder that nature has its own agenda."

"Thirty's the beauty of gardening, because the plants really teach you what you need to know," Rubus said. "And every year you get another chance."

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Towering

In Irasburg, one home is a castle

by MARK DAVIS

in the NEK



In 1959, Harv and Sara Gregoire bought 20 acres of land in Irasburg after spending only one day in the tiny town. The couple, who then lived in Germany, didn't know how harsh Vermont winters can be. They didn't realize how close Irasburg is to Canada. And they had no idea that the region they'd decided to call home is known as the Northeast Kingdom.

Perhaps it was ironic that the Kingdom's newest residents planned to build out a home but a castle. Working with their own hands and from their own designs, the Gregoires built a 3,000-square-foot Bavarian-style castle, complete with four towers and a moat.

The Irasburg Castle, which took seven years to finish, has become something of a local landmark in a blue collar town that has been adversely impacted by the dual declines of family dairy farms and the local timber industry.

Initially the Gregoires found a new challenge: finding a keeper for their seasonal home, the couple is now in New Mexico. After advertising the place for five months, they received an offer in early March.

EURO DREAMS

Harv is a retired Navy commander and college professor who spent much of his life moving around the U.S. and teaching in Europe. He met Sara there.

Living together in Germany, the Gregoires were enchanted by the

castles that dotted the landscape, and they vowed to live in one of their own someday. "Every time we got there, we stopped and drooled for 10 minutes," Harv said of one particular favorite.

True to their adventures, the couple knew they wanted to move back to the United States but were open to settling almost anywhere, provided the place felt right.

They considered northern Minnesota and checked out Maine and New Hampshire. Driving through Vermont, they fell in love with the landscape.

"The more we drove north, it got prettier and less expensive," Sara said.

In Irasburg, the couple found a gorgeous tract of land off Burton Hill Road. After other suitors, they made an offer. They were back in Germany when they learned it had been accepted.

They spent the next year researching and designing the castle. When Sara had trouble visualizing the floor plan, her husband drew up, he made her a 3D model, which they still have.

Word got around soon after the Gregoires arrived in Irasburg to begin

work on the whimsical project. They lived in their truck for a couple of days, then in a plywood shack while they erected the castle's walls as a roof and installed the windows.

They moved into the shell of the structure — with walls, a woodstove, a chimney and little else — in November 1969. A few days later, a blizzard dumped three feet of snow on the project and paralyzed their work for a week.

Aside from digging the basement and pouring the foundation, the Gregoires did most the work on the castle themselves.

"Amazing," Harv said. "But we made it a hobby. We got a lot of enjoyment out of doing it."

"It's because very rarely do you have that two people live in," Sara said.

A LOCAL CURIOSITY

Before the floors had even been installed, a young couple dropped in and asked if they could get married in the castle.



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Towering in the NEK

KEVIN



"A lot of people felt a part of it," Sam said. "We liked that feeling."

Over the years, she and Hans hosted two more weddings and thousands of area schoolchildren. They've turned the castle into a field trip destination and learning opportunity.

"We told them, 'We weren't professional builders. Everything we did we learned from library books,'" Sam said. "We tried to get the message across that, if you can read, you can do anything."

Aside from the two-story castle with its four towers, there's a small pond stocked with trout, and that most "keep the barbarians away," Hans quipped.

Oh, and there's an aircraft hanger and 900-foot airstrip. Here, a former Navy pilot, builds and flies ultralight planes.

**IT'S BECOME
WAY MORE THAN A
HOUSE THAT TWO
PEOPLE LIVE IN.**

LARA GREGG

The inside of the castle is every bit as as impressive and distinctive as the outside. It's heated with a Finnish masonry furnace that is equipped with a dumbwaiter to bring wood up from the basement. The attached pizza oven supplements a commercial Vulcan stove. Arched and stained-glass windows are everywhere. Staircase railings in the bedrooms are a nod to European interior design.

Despite its unique characteristics, the castle, which is set back from the road and partially obscured by trees, somehow fits in with the neighborhood. According to the Greggs, it doesn't need any significant improvements, most of the appliances are new.

Another benefit: Franchising doesn't have any local zoning to prohibit, say a bed and breakfast, and the castle's septic and electrical systems are equipped for commercial purposes. Here once ran a café and small antique shop inside the castle.

The Greggs have sold most of their furniture and assembled a user's manual for the new owners. At this point in their lives, they want to live somewhere warm, and Las Grutas fits the bill. This time, however, someone else is building their home, which is supposed to be ready by June. It's true, they need, for a new adventure. ♥

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nest House Hunt!

Following first-time home buyers on the search for their dream homes

BY CAROLYN FOX

If you're starting to think about getting out of that rental and buying your own home, our House Hunters just might have some eye-opening tips for you. There's a learning curve, complete with near misses, drama and mystifying paperwork along the way.



Sarah McLellan and her family dog

When the McLellans move into their new home, we'll be giving them a housewarming present: a four-hour home-design consultation and \$100 gift certificate from Lowe's Kitchen Bath & Linens.

Follow along!

We'll keep you posted on our House Hunters progress on our website at sevensixmag.com and on our biweekly e-newsletter *Real Estate* (sign up at dwellingspot.com/newsletters for tips on home, design and real estate.)

Would you like to be the next *Real Estate* House Hunters? If you're a savvy first-time home buyer or a veteran pro, share your progress, learn from your experience and ultimately help others become homeowners! We want to hear that new house. All you need is a laptop, a few notes, check-in with us once a week and send your contact us at real@sevensixmag.com

When *Nest* first spoke to Sarah and Sam McLellan last October, the couple had recently moved to Burlington from Boston and were, in Sarah's words, "intensely" and "super casually" starting the house-hunting process. But by January, their home-buying timeline had "jumped to immediate," Sarah says. What changed? Their first baby, a boy, is now on the way, scheduled to make his big debut this July.

"We weren't feeling too stressed at the time, and then winter came, and we found out we're adding to the household," says Sarah. "And we're like, Oh, shit! We gotta get out *before* winter!"

Sam, 32, works for the federal government and was transferred to Vermont last March. Sarah, 31, followed him in August, after completing her year as a preschool teacher. They moved into a month-by-month rental that Sarah describes as "meh" — there's not even heat. "We're being GIS with our landlord now," she says, "but it's not the same."

She observes that rentals here are slightly more affordable than in Boston, where the McLellans had lived for the last two and a half years. There, "we were paying a whole lot of money for a place with mold in it," she explains. But when it comes to buying, they're struggled to find a decent home in Vermont, too.

"It just seems like there's a whole lot of demand and not a lot of supply," Sarah says. "And what's out there is really not great, especially for a young family." They've looked at homes that one had the cutest, she notes, adding, "My friend found a place where there weren't any hunting, and the [owner] didn't seem to care."

"At this point in our lives, we're looking for something a little bit nicer," she says.

Ideally, the couple would like a home in Burlington's Old North End, where they can easily walk to downtown. A near-to-town location to their No. 1 concern. "We saw this really lovely house in the New North End, and it was beautiful," says Sarah. "It was this cute, tiny house with a great yard for the dog. But I couldn't walk to a coffee shop in 20 minutes. It was a little too suburban for me." Especially now, knowing that I'm going to be in a house with my infant for a while, I need to be able to get out of my house quickly and just go for a walk."

Other than walkability, the McLellans aren't picky. They're hoping to move back to Boston in a couple of years, so that's only their main criterion is that the home has good resale value. With that in mind, a real estate agent friend told them, "I wouldn't need to be perfect here. It doesn't need to be your dream home. It just needs to be something attractive." So Sarah and Sam are looking for at least two to three bedrooms, something big enough to notice a broad range of future buyers.

As *Nest* goes to press, the McLellans are under contract for an older Old North End home with a small backyard that's very close to downtown. "It really catches my eye more aesthetically," says Sarah. "It's so cute, but it also still is so very much up in the air." The sellers were close until they've found suitable housing, so Sarah and Sam aren't moving forward with inspection or appraisal until that's been resolved. In the meantime, says Sarah, "We'll also continue looking around, just in case."

TOP TIPS

The McLellans offer the following advice for fellow home buyers.

Narrow your price range. Initially, Sarah and Sam were looking at homes in Vermont from \$250,000 to \$300,000, because they didn't expect how much things would go up. "My price range was set by how much we could afford to spend," says Sarah. "We were a little bit out of sync with the market." To compare homes of such different values was challenging, Sarah explains. She suggests having a serious budget discussion from the get-go. She also notes that looking at their desired properties with the addition of regular bills, property taxes and other expenses helped them find their comfort zone.

Mind the parameters on your property-listing card. Unless it's really really a dire need, don't put it as your parameter, advises Sarah. At first, on their Caldwells forster Hickok & Associates Realty card, the couple ruled out any homes with fewer than 1.5 bathrooms. "But that wasn't really necessary, and it was cutting out other places that were wonderful," Sarah says.

Take a home-buying class. Sam attended a South Coast Home Party when he first moved to Vermont and connected with their real estate agent. She brought me to a home party, like, and... it was a really excellent way to learn the ins and outs of real estate," says Sarah. "I definitely felt more confident about it."

She shares.



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Buying to Rent

The complex issue of duplex ownership

BY NANCY STEARNS BERCAN

Perhaps you've seen the show "Income Property" on HGTV, in which the affable host, self-taught real estate mogul Scott McGillivray, helps first-time home buyers turn part of their new abode into an income-producing apartment. Within each half-hour episode, the show's participants find themselves in a renovated two-family residence with the promise of rapid home equity. Audiences are left wondering if they, too, can make the move to easy street.

The reality is not as simple as HGTV makes it out to be, of course. Owning and managing an investment property requires a lot of patience, preparation and calculation. Income properties work best for those willing to do their homework.

Ashley Wisniewski, a real estate agent at Preferred Properties and CEO/owner of Fusion Property Management, is a RTV version of HGTV's McGillivray. Wisniewski has been turning real estate into rental income since she turned 21 in 2007. Back then, she bought her first property, a condo in Warsaw, with no money down through the Vermont Housing Finance Agency. The particular lending program she used no longer exists, but other state and federal options abound.

"I knew I'd have to live some where," Wisniewski explains. "Why not

pay down my own mortgage instead of paying down my landlord's mortgage?"

Two years later, with 3.5 percent down, she added an Ocean City duplex to her budding portfolio. Wisniewski covered her mortgage by having a roommate, as well as a tenant. She went on to buy a single-family home in 2010 with an attached apartment and soon thereafter made the leap into "full-on rental properties," she says, in addition to multifamily buildings.

Today, Wisniewski and her husband and business partner, Brian, pay a monthly mortgage of \$800 on a primary residence worth more than \$350,000, and they enjoy substantial returns on their other properties. She cites several reasons income properties make a solid investment for financially people. The principle is paid down by your tenants' rent, property appreciation over time,



PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS

and there is generally a positive cash flow after expenses.

In this post-real-estate-bubble market, investors do need some cash to get the ball rolling — and keep it going. According to Jeff Smith, director of credit administration with NorthCountry Federal Credit Union, “Buyers must have assets for both down payments and reserves, as well as sufficient income.” Smith cautions that first-time investment-property buyers must qualify for the loan using only their existing income.

“Even though the property being purchased will generate income for the applicant, the income cannot be used to help them qualify,” he explains. “An applicant is not able to use projected rental income in a purchase situation until they can demonstrate previous rental experience by showing rental

instruments through the company, they provide services to others who are less keen on the day-to-day gritty-gritty of management.”

Becoming a landlord is itself a serious business. Wisniewski recommends having a solid plan to ensure that “the property is run as a business, not a hobby.”

“You’ve got to be prepared to solve issues, especially related to utility concerns, for your tenants,” she explains. “Different states and states can have specific rules to properties in their locations. It’s super important to understand and follow all the laws.”

The Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development offers resources and links to housing codes and fair-housing laws. Also, the Vermont Apartment Owners Association helps landlords navigate information, forms and ordinances



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Authority outlines all the rules and regulations pertaining to affordable housing (Section 8) properties.

The bottom line is that investment properties should be considered part of a long-term financial strategy, not a quick fix.

Burlington couple Deb Lachinfield and Jeff Schellenz owned a downtown duplex for 10 years. They lived upstairs, mortgage-paying renters were on the ground floor. As landlords, they held up their end of the bargain by keeping the property in good working order, and they enjoyed the company of a number of long-term, responsible tenants.

In the end, even with capital gains tax, explains Lachinfield, selling the property afforded the couple and their three kids “the opportunity to buy the single-family home of their dreams.”

income on their federal income tax returns.”

Down payment requirements fluctuate by property. “Buying a primary residence can require as little as 3 percent down,” Smith notes. “Buying an investment property can require 15 to 25 percent down, depending upon qualifying criteria and number of units.”

To complicate matters, there is the precise issue of ownership. Smith reports that investors can qualify for conventional financing if they will personally own the property. But buyers who create a limited liability company for legal protection may find themselves outside of conventional financing options and on the commercial realm. Additionally, he says, anything over four units is truly considered a commercial property and is not eligible for the same financing options.

Smith advises consulting with a real estate lawyer to understand the legal risks and tax implications associated with investment properties.

Ashley and Bruce Wadsworth owned and operated their properties for five years before creating Paxton Property Management in 2013. In addition to managing their own real estate

INFO

Ashley Wadsworth, owner, Rental Income Workshop, is a featured speaker every other week. Learn more at mcsos.com/real estate/rental.

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Make Your Move

A practical housewarming kit to help new homeowners survive moving day

BY CAROLYN FOX

Papertowels a sponge and all-purpose cleaner because half of moving is in cleaning up

Toilet paper and hand soap because everybody always forgets it. Consider rolling up the TP in wrapping paper of gifting is kinda tacky

An attractive basket like or box to pack everything into. Select something sturdy that can be used again — a basket makes a good magazine rack while a hatted box doubles as closet storage

Pretty dish towels for drying hands and dusting

A bottle of bubbly because it's all too easy to forget to celebrate homeownership on that first day

A shower-curtain liner. There's nothing worse than getting ready to jump in the shower and realizing that, if you do, the bathroom will flood. Don't forget hooks!

Lightweight or disposable plates and tableware to get taken through until the proper dishware is uncovered

Sensors for opening up all those carefully duct-taped boxes

A coffee mug. When it's empty, you can put your iPhone in it and play music as you unpack. Voila — a speaker!

A bottle of aspirin to deal with the inevitable aches and pains of carrying around everything you own

This housewarming kit is endlessly adaptable. The Emily Post Institute suggests giving new town neighbors "some staples, like foam paper restaurant inserts, anything that will make it easier to feel welcome and at home. We have three lists. Here are some others."

- Coupons for pizza delivery and other takeout
- Delivery of snacks or homemade food at meetings
- Instant coffee or tea bags
- Gift card to a home-improvement store
- Tape measure, hammer and screwdriver — or better of a full toolbox
- "Coupons" for babysitting during the busy settling-in period
- Ladder or mattress or sleeping bag and of bedding is required
- A basic first-aid kit

Spring signals the start of a busy home-buying season, especially in Vermont. Now that piles of snow and 4 p.m. sunsets aren't obscuring homes and yards, more sellers are putting up the "For sale" signs — and house hunters who have been waiting all winter for the right home to come on the market are jumping at the chance to buy.

So spring is also the season of housewarming gifts. According to the Burlington-based Emily Post Institute, a national authority on etiquette, these gifts "are usually small tokens, not major items. This is, after all, not a wedding." The institute suggests giving "something lasting for the house": guest towels, a houseplant, a cheeseboard, a perfume burner, etc. We like a good houseplant as much as the next person, but we couldn't help thinking that moving day itself — always a struggle — calls for more practical gifts, and ones that may be far more appreciated.

Think about it: When you're moving, you're up at the crack of dawn to sort

the U-Haul, pack it up, pick up the keys, and begin the days-long task of cleaning and unpacking. You're lifting couches, washing floors and — shoot! You didn't even think to bring toilet paper. And at the end of the day, when you're ready for dinner, you have to dig through all your boxes to find the spaghetti sauce.

Send your neighbor an easy, low-cost housewarming kit to help new homeowners survive — and thrive — on moving day. Whether you're giving it to friends or family or taking notes for your own upcoming move, everything here is designed to be immediately helpful while still useful in the long run. Now, get a move on! 🍷

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